

**CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY AS A DETERMINING FACTOR FOR NATION BUILDING:  
AN EXEGETICAL DISCOURSE ON LUKE 20:21-25**

**By**

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**Abstract**

*Often times, it appears that the task of national development or nation building has been viewed as the sole responsibility of leadership and what it offers a nation. It may not be out of place to state that it is only on few occasions have much attention been given to what followership or the citizens of a nation must not fail to do to enhance and promote nation building. Thus, in most countries of the world today especially in Africa, the common mantra has remained; “Leadership is the problem of Africa”. In other words, people in this kind of localities always tend to hold the leaders responsible for the development or underdevelopment of their nation. It is a situation where everyone is on the lookout for what the government will do for him or her and while this mentality is maintained, little or no attention is given to what the citizen or individual has to and must do to contribute positively to nation building. This paper attempts an exegetical discourse on Luke 20:21-25 where an account is rendered on where Jesus Christ was confronted with the question on whether citizens should continue to pay tax to the governing system that exists then. And from his response, Christ authenticates the fact that civic responsibility is something one cannot shy away from irrespective of one’s religious belief. Through an exegetical method of analysis and consultation of some well written related documents, the paper seeks to opine that despite what leadership has to offer to better a nation, a balanced national development cannot be achieved without the citizens carrying out their civic responsibilities as it remains a determining factor for the growth of a nation vis a vis nation building. It thus recommends that civic responsibility must be handled with all diligence by both the leaders and followers in a nation if there must be sustainable national development and growth.*

**Keywords:** Civic Responsibility, Nation Building, Exegesis

## **Introduction**

In recent times, a lot has really transpired in Africa especially in Nigeria to challenge the hope of building a politically, socially, economically or financially stable nation. Apparent in all of these challenges is the fact that accusing fingers are always pointing towards leadership where things are not as they should be. Hence, to a layman, the underdevelopment being experienced in Africa and Nigeria to be precise is solely the result of poor and bad leadership. So much blame has been pushed to the leaders to the extent that the citizens are now losing the civic education that they are equally part of whatever government that be and therefore has a lot to contribute towards the development of whatever nation in which they found themselves.

Undoubtedly, leadership in Nigeria may not be addressed as ‘beautiful’ nor ‘too good’ but then it will not get better if it is backed up by ‘bad’ citizenship as well since it is still the citizens who rise to become leaders. This is obviously in line with the notion that ‘two wrongs cannot make a right’. Most citizens in Nigeria today especially the youth are already disengaging themselves from whatever roles expected of them to enhance national growth or nation building because of the wrong generalization that everyone in the country is corrupt. Thus evading the payment of taxes is seen as nothing as well as involving in all sorts of criminal activities like internet fraud and trafficking of human persons to mention but a few. In a nation where these sorts of civic irresponsibility abound, even if there is a responsible and working leadership, achieving positive nation building still becomes a herculean task.

However, the fact must be upheld that in a democratic dispensation as we have in Nigeria, everyone possesses fundamental rights and privileges as well as obligations to other citizens, the community and the nation in general. Unfortunately, while most people focus and insist on their own rights and what favours them, they fail to carry out their responsibility to others. While some do this out of ignorance, many others base theirs on unwholesome and imbalanced religious principles and doctrines as well as intentional criminal mindsets. Unarguably, it is this failure to discharge their civic responsibility which constitutes a monumental obstacle to the nation’s effort towards achieving the much needed social and economic development. Hence, as partly mentioned already, people, particularly the youth are turning to crime, drugs, and prostitution which are not far from

the failure on the part of parents, guardians, teachers, institutions and society influencers to provide the necessary training and direction even at this critical period. Where leaders have been negligent in their responsibility to the citizens, they (the citizens), joining the bandwagon will not bring positive remedy but will be an obstacle towards nation building.

This paper therefore seeks to awaken the consciousness of civic responsibility as an important factor for nation building in Nigeria. It hopes to achieve this through an exegetical discourse on Luke 20:21-25 as well as the consultation of other well written related documents and literature with the application of structural functionalism theory. It suggests that every citizen must and should not relent in carrying out his or her civic duties irrespective of religious or political affiliations if a positive nation building would be attained at all levels in Nigeria. To further enhance the coherency and comprehensiveness of the work, some of the key terms in the work would be clarified as follows.

### **Clarification of Key Terms**

It is of great necessity and quite pertinent to clarify some of the key words in this paper, in order to give room for massive coherency. Some of these terms include: civic responsibility, nation building, and exegesis.

### **Civic Responsibility**

For Gottlieb and Robinson (2006), attempting to define civic responsibility can be a daunting task because of frequently overlapping constructs, values, and interpretations. Indeed, the very mention of the term *civic responsibility* evokes notions of what it means to live in a democracy, in addition to the complementary ideas of citizenship, social responsibility, civic engagement, and community involvement. In constructing a working definition of civic responsibility they chose to depict it as an overarching concept that encompasses civic engagement and what it means to be a citizen. In their words, “Civic responsibility means active participation in the public life of a community in an informed, committed, and constructive manner, with a focus on the common good” (p.16). They further go on to present a list of possible definitions for the concept in order to capture what they termed an all encompassing explanation. These possible clarifications are as follows;

- i. Addressing society’s problems in an informed manner
- ii. Showing respect as well as dissent for laws
- iii. Recognizing the difference between legally defined and culturally defined citizenship

- iv. Engaging in an active process that goes beyond passive citizenship
- v. Establishing a balance between rights and responsibilities
- vi. Understanding the concept of the common good and who defines it
- vii. Being able to negotiate differences
- viii. Involving the community in decision-making processes
- ix. Embracing the concept of participatory democracy
- x. Questioning governmental policies and practices
- xi. Determining ways to alter public policy
- xii. Exhibiting stewardship, i.e., being responsible for one's community
- xiii. Recognizing the value and human dignity of each person
- xiv. Reaching varying degrees of political awareness and advocacy, ranging from basic knowledge (e.g., knowing the local mayor's name) to developing a voice and making oneself heard (p.17).

Civic responsibility for Weeks (1998), is comprised of actions and attitudes associated with democratic governance and social participation. Actions of civic responsibility can be displayed in advocacy for various causes. By advocating social issues or environmental concerns, people strengthen their commitment as well as their own individual citizenship. Some attitudes related to civic responsibility include the intention to serve others, the belief that helping others is one's social responsibility, and the tolerance and appreciation of human differences.

The above definitions go a long way to ascertain that civic responsibility really has a lot to offer when it comes to building and developing a nation. It equally strengthens one's citizenship as rightly pointed out by Weeks (1998). It can thus be summarized as Ehrlich (2000) that civic responsibility is "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes." (p.4). In addition, civic responsibility encompasses actions wherein individuals participate in activities of personal and public concern that are both individually life enriching and socially beneficial to the community and the nation at large.

### **Nation-Building**

Herder (2004) and Fichte (2008) are both in agreement that the concept of nation-building cannot be understood without the help of certain key concepts such as the nation, national identity, nation-state, and nationalism. The term “nation” has been defined by multiple philosophers, scholars, and practitioners. These definitions range from essentialist ones that reify certain characteristics as purely national ones to more constructivist ones highlighting collective ascription as a key element for the existence of a nation. Laitin (2007) defines the nation as a population with a coordinated set of beliefs about their cultural identities whose representatives claim ownership of a state for them by dint of that coordination either through separation, amalgamation, or return. Benefits of coordination explain the stickiness of these national identities. This goes to authenticate the fact that nations stay together when citizens share more than enough values and preferences and can communicate with each other. Nation-building therefore could be understood as the process through which the boundaries of the modern state and those of the national community become congruent for the sole aim of achieving national integration.

However, according to Gambari (2008), nation-building has many important aspects, firstly, it is about building a political entity which corresponds to a given territory, based on some generally accepted rules, norms, and principles, and a common citizenship. Secondly, it is also about building institutions which symbolize the political entity – institutions such as a bureaucracy, an economy, the judiciary, universities, a civil service, and civil society organizations. Above all else, nation-building is about building a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny, a collective imagination of belonging. A good understanding of Gambari’s presentation (2008) can easily make one to see the obvious similarities between nation-building and national development, whereby the viability and modernity of the nation in question become synonymous with nation-building.

### **Exegesis**

According to the New Catholic Encyclopedia (1967), the term exegesis is the explanation of a passage or a book of the Bible. The Greek word *‘exhghsivj* from which the English word exegesis is derived means literally a leading out. The purpose of exegesis, therefore, is “to bring-out” “to set forth”, and explain an author’s thought. Since the sacred scriptures are divinely inspired books,

the purpose of Biblical exegesis is to set forth and explain their full thoughts not only as human documents but also as writings containing God's word and God's revelation.

In the words of Zuck (2002), "Exegesis is the exposition or explanation of a text based on a careful, objective analysis"(p.17). The word for him literally means "to lead out of". That means that the interpreter is led to his conclusions by following the text. Obviously, only exegesis does justice to the Biblical text. It is concerned with discovering the true meaning of the text, respecting its grammar, syntax, and setting. Exegesis allows us to agree with the Bible.

The process of exegesis involves (1) Observation: what does the passage say? (2) Interpretation: what does the passage mean? (3) Correlation: how does the passage relate to the rest of the Bible? And (4) Application: how should this passage affect one's life?

Exegesis, simply put is a critical explanation or interpretation of a text, particularly a religious text. It is a systematic process by which a person arrives at a reasonable and coherent sense of the meaning and message of a biblical passage. Here, an understanding of the original text (Greek and Hebrew) is required.

Having made attempt in clarifying some keywords as seen above, it is in the belief of the researcher that appreciating the rest of this work will not be too tedious for any reader. It is equally the in the expectation of the researcher that further works on the theoretical framework and the exegetical discourse as well as the hermeneutical applications will make the paper more coherent and comprehensive.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Structural Functionalism Theory**

Haralambos and Holborn (2008) are of the view that functionalism theory is developed by Emile Durkheim and refined by Talcott Parson. Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer and Robert K. Merton were among the proponents of this theory. According to Ogunbameru (2010), Structural functionalism theory is the theory which focuses on society as an entity in which all of the components work together cooperatively and cohesively for the betterment of the overall society"(p.16). Nwadiibia (1991) observes that these early sociologists perceive society as a system composed of interrelated institution or parts such as family, economy, religion and education which perform functions essential for the survival of the society. In a nutshell, most of the advocates of this theory gave harmonious picture of the society, by laying much emphasizes on

the functional unity of the system, but Robert Merton opposed the ideal. According to Ogunbameru (2010), Merton criticized functional unity of the society, by stating that not all the parts of a modern complex society work for the functional unity of the society. According to Hralambos and Holborn (2008), Merton argues that “the assumption that every aspect of the social system performs a positive function is not only premature, but it may also be incorrect. He added that the analysis should proceed from the assumption that any part of the society may be functional, dysfunctional or nonfunctional. This implies that an institution has the capability of playing positive and negative roles in the society.

Vividly, Ritzer (2012), states that Merton developed the idea of a dysfunction which means that just as social structures or institutions could contribute to the maintenance of other parts of the social system, they also could have negative consequences for them. For instance he expiates that slavery in the Southern United State have positive and negative consequences. Positively, slavery supplies, cheap labour and support for cotton economy. On negative side, it makes southerners overly dependent on an agrarian economy and therefore unprepared for industrialization. An in-depth reflection on the relationship between Merton’s contributions to functionalism theory, disclosed that the theory is germane for the study on how civic responsibility can factor in nation-building. The positive or negative contributions of citizens have enormous influence it can assert on the growth and development of a nation. Likewise, the leaders can either chose to be positive or negative in their approach to developing a nation; this can be seen in their actions and policies as they run the affairs of whatever society they are part and parcel of.

### **Establishment of the Textual Form and Orientation**

Here, effort is made to view the text, Luke 20:21-25 with an exegetical lens, pointing out its textual problems if any. This would be followed by the delimitation/orientation of the text.

#### **a. Textual Criticism of Luke 20:21-25**

Nestle – Aland presents the text as: **Luke 20:21-25**

<sup>21</sup> *kai. evphrw,thsan auvto.n le,gontej\ dida,skale( oi;damen o[ti ovrqw/j le,geij kai. dida,skeij kai. ouv lambda,neij pro,swpon( avllV evpV avlhqei,aj th.n o`do.n tou/ qeou/ dida,skeij\* <sup>22</sup> *e;xestin h`ma/j Kai,sari fo,ron dou/nai h' ou;* <sup>23</sup> *katanoh,saj de. auvtw/n th.n panourgia,an ei=pen pro.j*

*auvtou,j*<sup>24</sup> *dei,xate, moi dhna,rion\ ti,noj e;cei eivko,na kai. evpigraph,nÈ oi` de. ei=pan\ Kai,saroj*<sup>25</sup> *o` de. ei=pen pro.j auvtou,j\ toi,nun avpo,dote ta. Kai,saroj Kai,sari kai. ta. tou/ qeou/ tw/| qew/|*Å

A careful comparison of the text with other variants reveals few textual difficulties. This few would be pointed out here. Meanwhile, just as Read-Heimerdinger and Rius-Camps (2014) note, present synopses of the Gospels, whether in Greek or in translation, generally adopt the Nestle-Aland edition of the Greek text. The principle of this text is that it is an eclectic one, with readings taken from many different manuscripts. Evidence of the procedure followed is apparent throughout the critical apparatus where the support is displayed for the readings selected by the editors as being most likely to be original, support that is found among the Greek manuscripts and lectionaries, the early versions and the writings of the Church Fathers. Alongside this information are presented alternative readings together with their corresponding witnesses. In consulting the apparatus it can be seen that the support for the printed text varies somewhat from one place of variation to another. At the same time, it also emerges that, in actual fact, the text of the Gospels selected by the editors is largely that attested by Codex Vaticanus (B03), supported more often than not by Codex Sinaiticus (ⲛ01). Dated to the middle of the 4th century, these manuscripts present the earliest complete Gospels in Greek and the value of many of their readings is confirmed by their presence among the papyrus fragments from the 3rd and 4th centuries (notably  $\hat{\Gamma}^{45.75}$ ).

Thus, in v.21, the negation article *ouv*(no or not) is rendered as *ouvdevoj* in D sy<sup>5.c</sup>(Codex Bezae). In v.22, *h`ma/j*(personal pronoun in accusative case, plural; us) is presented as *h[min* in B03(Codex Vaticanus). In v.23, the noun *panourgi,an*(cleverness, craftiness or trickery) is displayed as *ponhrianin* Basil Chrysostom (Cyril) Hesychius<sup>lat</sup>. In v.25, the possessive (genitive) definite article *tou/*(‘of the’ or ‘from the’) is written as *tw* which is in the dative case. Therefore, going by the *Lectio difficilior* which states that the more difficult reading a manuscript has, the closer it is to the original, the text here (Nestle Aland) is taken to be closer to the original and to account to other readings in the other manuscripts.

## **b. Presentation of a Working Translation**

The proposed working translation is presented as follows: “<sup>21</sup>And they questioned him, saying “Teacher, we know that you say and teach what is right, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. <sup>22</sup>Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” <sup>23</sup>But he perceived their

craftiness, and said to them, <sup>24</sup> “Show to me a coin. Whose image and inscription has it?” They said, “Caesar's.”<sup>25</sup> He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.”

### c. Delimitation of the Text

Apparently, the text as presented above has been discussed by many biblical commentators under the title “The question about paying taxes”. It is also quite obvious here that the people who present this question have ulterior motives written all over them. Henry (2008) observes that “this was an obvious and clumsy attempt to influence Jesus with flattery. They hoped Jesus was insecure or foolish enough to be impressed by their hollow praise.” He suggests that we have here Christ's evading a snare which his enemies laid for him, by proposing a question to him about tribute. It must be stated here that Christ in his wisdom gave them an appropriate answer which made it difficult for them to trap him in anyway. His response however made it clear that since they have a coin bearing Caesar's image (an indication that Caesar is working for them), paying tax to him is not wrong at all. And at the end of the drama, they left without anything against Christ.

### Interpretation and Analysis of the Text (Luke 20:21-25)

For the interpretation and the analysis of the text, Henry's commentaries will be of great assistance. Henry (2008) has the following expositions on the text. According to him, the Pharisees proposed a question, with which they hoped to ensnare Jesus Christ. Their preface is very courtly: **Teacher, we know that you say and teach what is right** (v.21). Thus they thought to flatter him into an incautious freedom and openness with them, and so to gain their point. Obviously, they that are proud, and love to be commended, will be brought to do anything for those that will but flatter them, and speak kindly to them; but they were much mistaken who thought thus to impose upon the humble Jesus. He was not pleased with the testimony of such hypocrites, nor thought himself honoured by it. It is true that he accepts not the person of any, but it is as true that he knows the hearts of all, and knew theirs, and the seven abominations that were there, though they spoke fair. It was certain that he taught the way of God truly but he knew that they were unworthy to be taught by him, who came to take hold of his words not to be taken hold of by them.

Furthermore, Henry (2008) submits that their case is very nice: **“Is it lawful for us (this is added here in Luke) “to give tribute to Caesar”** -for us Jews, us the free-born seed of Abraham, us that pay the Lord's tribute, may give tribute to Caesar?” v.22. Their pride and covetousness made them

loath to pay taxes, and then they would have it a question whether it was lawful or no. Now if Christ should say that it was lawful the people would take it ill, for they expected that he who set up to be the Messiah should in the first place free them from the Roman yoke, and stand by them in denying tribute to Caesar. But if he should say that it was not lawful, as they expected he would (for if he had not been of that mind they thought he could not have been so much the darling of the people as he was), then they should have something to accuse him of to the governor, which was what they wanted.

**His evading the snare which they laid for him:** Jesus perceived their craftiness, v.23. Note, those that are most crafty in their designs against Christ and his gospel cannot with all their art conceal them from his cognizance. He can see through the most politic disguises, and so break through the most dangerous snare; for surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird. He did not give them a direct answer, but reproved them for offering to impose upon him- why tempt ye me? and called for a piece of money, current money with the merchants- Show me a penny; and asked them whose money it was, whose stamp it bore, who coined it. They owned, “It is Caesar’s money.” “Why then,” said Christ, “you should first have asked whether it was lawful to pay and receive Caesar’s money among yourselves, and to admit that to be the instrument of your commerce. But, having granted this by a common consent, you are concluded by your own act, and, no doubt, you ought to give tribute to him who furnished you with this convenience for your trade, protects you in it, and lends you the sanction of his authority for the value of your money. You must therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s. In civil things you ought to submit to the civil powers, and so, if Caesar protects you in your civil rights by laws and the administration of justice, you ought to pay him tribute; but in sacred things God only is your King. You are not bound to be of Caesar’s religion; you must render to God the things that are God’s, must worship and adore him only, and not any golden image that Caesar sets up;” and we must worship and adore him in such way as he had appointed, and not according to the inventions of Caesar. It is God only that has authority to say “My son, give me thy heart.” (Henry, 2008:1512).

#### **Luke 20:21-25: Hermeneutical Approach**

At this juncture, it must be stated clearly that civic responsibility falls on all the entities in the society; both the leaders and those being led. In other words, all the citizens have it in common as an obligation to live up their civic responsibility for the positive advancement and growth of the

nation. This assertion is equally in line with the view of Boyer (1987) who stresses that the goal of higher education is not only to prepare individuals for productive careers, “but also to enable them to live lives of dignity and purpose; not only to generate new knowledge, but to channel that knowledge to humane ends; not merely to study government, but to help shape a citizenry that can promote the public good” (p.14).

Apparently, the set of Jews who approached Jesus Christ as seen in the text came with two motives. One of their motives is to trap Christ based on his utterances. Another one is to find a ground upon which to shy away from their civic duties on the angle of paying taxes. A good number of modern day Christians have been and are still guilty of this kind of mentality. Some are of the view that the government (those in political position) are not doing anything for the society, hence no need for the payment of taxes. However, a careful study of the interpretation of the text presents Christ as giving what appears to be enlightenment to his critiques. Right before their eyes, they could not deny that the image on the coin they use in their day to day business transactions is the head of Caesar. In this same way, despite the fact that our leaders are failing to do all that is expected of them in terms of leadership roles, the fact cannot be denied that there are so many provisions benefitting the citizens which are made available by the government.

Again, it must be pointed out here that for the community of Christ’s days, there was a working Caesar. Not only was the coin bearing Caesar’s image, Jesus’ statement on giving to Caesar what is Caesar’s suggests that he (Caesar) is actually giving out to the people. This is also a lesson for the few privileged citizens who found themselves in leadership position in our country Nigeria. For there to positive nation building, it has already been pointed out in this paper before now that all hands must be on deck. With emphasis on payment of taxes, it is only when those in authorities have made available the basic amenities for the community that they should expect the led to carry out their own duties. Vaughan (2000) shares similar view when he asserts that to serve the community, institutions must help prepare individuals to be effective leaders and citizens who understand and embrace the concept of civic responsibility.

Furthermore, the text also made it clear that being a Christian or a member of any other religious body does not stop one from carry out civic duties or responsibility. When Christians for instance, evade taxes or fail to take care of government properties, they are obviously not living Christ-like life. This is because Jesus Christ, apart from urging the Jews to go on and pay tribute to Caesar

equally paid tribute himself (Matthew 17:24-27). Thus a Christian who evades taxes of all kind or litters the street with refuse or waste materials, thereby keeping the environment unclean and unhealthy is apparently not helping in nation building as he or her lacks in civic responsibility. A good understanding of the text should encourage an average Nigerian Christian to do away with the mentality that “the government only eats tax payers’ money” and thereby resolving to not paying taxes which in turn will affect national growth adversely. The mentality should remain, “I must play my own part and leave them (government) to play theirs. Just as Christ asked the people questioning him to check the image on their coin, citizens also have the right to always serve as critics by watching and commenting on the effectiveness and responsibility level of those in government. Doing this will certainly enhance nation building.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Nation building as it stands is a task that calls for collective efforts. Hence, before one starts blaming his or her government for poor national growth, he or she should equally pulse to examine him/herself to be sure that his or her wing is well covered. It is an unarguable fact that both the political leaders and those they are leading are all citizens of their particular country hence maintaining uprightness in civic responsibility does not exclude anyone. It is a responsibility for all the citizens both the private one (leaders) and the public ones (the led); all hands must be on deck. Just as Egharevba and Iruonagbe (2015), suggest “nation building is all about promoting the collective well-being of the people through meeting their needs, interests and aspirations and its hallmarks would be the pursuit of liberty, social justice, progress and prosperity for the people by government and its institutions”(p.45). Apparently, nationbuilding at this point begins to resemble good governance.

From the application of the exegetical text, it could clearly be seen that both leaders and the led have roles to play to ensure national growth. As Jesus Christ clearly points out, since it is Caesar (the government) who provides money for the people’s daily and business transactions, paying tribute (taxes) to him should not be seen as exploitation as many do today thereby seeking ways of evading taxes or shying away from civic responsibility.

This paper at this juncture therefore recommends the following for sustainable national growth in all nations especially Nigeria.

- i. Nation building should be seen as a collective responsibility for all citizens.

- ii. One's religious affiliation should not be used as an excuse to shy away from civic responsibility which is a determining factor towards nation building. Our text Luke 20:21-25 clearly demonstrates this.
- iii. It should also be taken into consideration at all times that nation build is something that takes time and thus does not occur overnight. Oyewole and Adegoke (2018) authenticate this view when they stress that "Nation-Building takes time to be achieved and it is a continuous process which has to be constantly reviewed depending on the changes in the immediate and global environments"(p.26). This is why one cannot say that because the government are not building roads today, then paying of taxes and carrying out other duties that enhance national growth should be stopped.
- iv. Laws and sanctions against civic irresponsibility must be strictly applied on all citizens (both public and private) since no one is above the law. In this manner, leaders who misappropriate tax payers' money should be held accountable at all times.
- v. Finally, our religious leaders should continue and not relent in encouraging their religious adherents to always be patriotic and faithful citizens who work for the growth of their respective communities with the same commitment and dedication they show in religious matters.

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